

Boyle, Deborah A. *The Well-Ordered Universe: The Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. x + 273. Cloth, \$74.00.

Deborah Boyle's book is a splendid addition to the literature on the philosophy of Margaret Cavendish (1623-73). It provides an overview of Cavendish's philosophical work, from her panpsychist materialism, through her views about human motivation and general political philosophy, to views about gender, health, and humans' relation to the rest of the natural world. Boyle emphasizes themes of order and regularity, but does not argue that there is a strong systematic connection between Cavendish's views. Indeed, she makes a point of noting the different ways in which the themes of order and regularity work in different areas of Cavendish's philosophy (7-8).

The early chapters consider Cavendish's natural philosophy. Thus, chapter 2 considers the atomist views found in her first book, the 1653 *Poems and Fancies*. Boyle takes time to think about what those atomist views are, but also – and perhaps more importantly for our overall picture of Cavendish's work – argues that Cavendish was “merely toying” (57) with atomism. Chapter 3 then considers Cavendish's later views about the natural world, which is wholly material: both what we might call the ‘mid period’ views of the *Philosophical Fancies* (1653) and the first edition of the *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), and the later views of better known texts from the 1660s. Some of Cavendish's notable views, such as the idea that there are different ‘degrees’ of matter, can be found in the texts from the 1650s. But others, such as the notion that inanimate, sensitive, and rational matter are all blended together throughout the world, are later developments. Chapter 4 builds on that discussion to look

at individual creatures in the material world, considering views about natural kinds, occasional causation, and self-knowledge.

In later chapters Boyle turns to Cavendish's views about human beings in particular. Thus chapter 5 looks at Cavendish's views on human motivation, before chapter 6 considers her views on peace and order in human society. That progression itself, like a number of things Cavendish said on these topics, sounds somewhat Hobbesian. While acknowledging some similarities, Boyle argues for differences between the two. Thus she shows that Cavendish was not a social contract theorist, arguing plausibly that some passages that might seem to suggest otherwise are misleading (149-51).

Boyle also argues that Cavendish and Hobbes differ in their accounts of human motivation. For instance, Cavendish grounded self-preservation in self-love (126). Human self-love is, moreover, different from that of other creatures: all creatures want to preserve themselves, but humans also want to be recognized and remembered (127). Hobbes meanwhile, Boyle notes, did not include self-love on his lists of passions. One might however wonder how far Cavendish was from a Hobbesian picture here, despite some differences in terminology. In Cavendish's view as Boyle describes it, the first part of human self-love is a (Hobbesian sounding) desire for self-preservation. The second part, the desire for recognition and fame, itself seems not so far from what Hobbes calls 'glory', which he identifies as one of the three principal causes of quarrel. Moreover, as Boyle notes Cavendish distinguishing better or worse forms of the desire and search for fame (134), so we can find Hobbes distinguishing "glorying to no end, [which] is vain-glory, and contrary to reason" from, presumably, other sorts of glorying (*Leviathan*, ch.

15). Perhaps, then, there is some reason to think that Cavendish was closer to Hobbes here than Boyle allows.

Chapter 7 investigates Cavendish's views on gender roles, arguing that those views were "consistently conservative" (166). Chapter 8's topic is humans' relationship to the rest of nature. Here Boyle argues, for example, that Cavendish had less concern for the welfare of animals than is sometimes suggested, and that what concern she did have did not come from sympathy with animals. Chapter 9 then considers health, something about which Cavendish had a good deal to say. This discussion places Cavendish's views about health in the bigger picture of her own work, but also in broader intellectual context.

The recent increase in interest in Cavendish's work among historians of philosophy has presumably left some people wanting to learn more about her. Though there is an increasing amount of secondary literature, much of it is (reasonably enough) articles about this or that aspect of her views. If you want to get an overall grasp on what's going on in Cavendish's philosophy, this book is an excellent guide. While it engages throughout with existing literature, it also gives a comprehensive and clear overview, and finds in the notions of order and regularity a plausible framework within which to organize Cavendish's many and diverse views. Inevitably, questions remain, and there are places where one would like to hear more. But overall, I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in the philosophical views of Margaret Cavendish.

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